

31st December 2020

Dear Parents/Carers and Staff,

Updates

- We are sure you will be aware that yesterday afternoon, the Government announced its plans for how pupils will return to School in England in January. We became aware of this information at the same time and via the same source as you, and have also seen the speculative information that has subsequently been circulated by local and National media.
- Whilst the Government indicated in their announcement that there will be a delay in the re-opening of many Schools, they have also made it very clear that Schools are remaining open for vulnerable children and that *“alternative provision and special schools will all return to face-to-face education from the start of term as planned.”* This includes Schools within named contingency framework areas such as Maidstone.
- Although the Government has at the same time stated that individual special schools will be *“offered greater flexibility on face-to-face attendance of pupils and students in the first week of term”* this proposal has not been extended to us.
- **As we are a Special School setting, and all of our pupils come under the Government’s definition of vulnerable, we therefore remain open, and staggered returns do not apply to us.**
- **As planned, the 4th January 2021 will continue to be an INSET day for staff. We will re-open for pupils on Tuesday 5th January 2021.**
- However, we fully understand that the parents / carers of our pupils may not wish to send their children into School. Whilst we are not able to officially authorise their absence, we will not follow up on any absence related issues. **To help us with our planning, please can you complete the following online survey, as soon as possible, to request provision [click on link to online survey](#)**
- All of our staff are critical workers and are therefore expected to make the necessary arrangements to enable them to work. **Staff must liaise with their children’s School as a matter of urgency to secure the prioritised provision that their child is entitled to.** We have prepared a supporting letter for staff, to submit to their children’s School, which emphasises their critical worker status. If staff do experience any problems securing this provision from 4th January, please let us know immediately – we will ask the Area Education Officer to intervene, and to speak to your child’s School directly to resolve the situation.
- The practical implementation of organising testing procedures within a context such as ours remains a very real challenge....
 - Staying open to all of our pupils means that we will not have the two week window that the Government has created for most Schools with Secondary aged pupils, to appropriately mobilise our mass testing programme.
 - We still await the publication of Government guidance regarding how testing is to be set up within a Special School setting.
 - In the meantime, our understanding is that:
 - Consent is fundamental to testing in Schools and that it will be an entirely optional process.

- Tests must be self-administered i.e. carried out independently under required clinical conditions
- On the basis of the above, we anticipate that:
 - The vast majority of pupils at the Loose Site will not be able to self-administer the tests under the required clinical conditions, and that we will not therefore be offering mass testing for pupils at the Loose Site at this time. We will review this in line with relevant guidance from the government as it is published.
 - Self-testing nasal swabs will be offered for students at the Snodland site (with the stipulation that these will need to be self-administered, under required clinical conditions) with parental consent.
 - Testing will be offered to all staff across all of our sites. Staff will be encouraged to be tested on a weekly basis.
- We continue to be as proactive as possible regarding these issues, and will keep you informed regarding future developments, timescales and our finalised plans.

Rest assured, we will continue to make pragmatic decisions regarding how best to manage the School during these challenging times, which prioritise the health and wellbeing of our entire community.

Thank you for your continued support and understanding.

Take care all,

The Senior Leadership Team

